

she said to St. Bridget, "What is more humbling than to be called a fool, to be in want of all things, and to believe one's self the most unworthy of all? Such, O daughter, was my humility; this was my joy; this was all my desire with which I thought how to please my Son alone."

The Venerable Sister Paula of Foligno was given to understand, in an ecstasy, how great was the humility of our Blessed Lady; and giving an account of it to her confessor, she was so filled with astonishment at its greatness, that she could only exclaim, "O, the humility of the Blessed Virgin! O, Father, the humility of the Blessed Virgin, how great was the humility of the Blessed Virgin! In the world there is no such thing as humility, not even in its lowest degree, when you see the humility of Mary." On another occasion our Lord showed St. Bridget two ladies. The one was all pomp and vanity. "She," He said, "is Pride; but the other one whom you see with her head bent down, courteous towards all, having God alone in her mind, and considering herself as no one, is Humility; her name is Mary." Hereby God was pleased to make known to us that the humility of His Blessed Mother was such that she was humility itself.

There can be no doubt, as St. Gregory of Nyssa remarks, that of all virtues there is perhaps none the practice of which is more difficult to our nature, corrupted as it is by sin, than that of humility. But there is no escape; we can never be true children of Mary if we are not humble. "If," says St. Bernard, "you can not imitate the virginity of this humble Virgin, imitate her humility." She detests the proud, and only invites the humble to come to her; *Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me.* "Mary," says Richard of St. Laurence, "protects us under the mantle of humility." The Mother of God herself explained to St. Bridget what her mantle was, saying, "Come, my daughter and hide thyself under my mantle; this mantle is my humility." She then added that the consideration of her humility was a good mantle with which we could warm ourselves; but that as a mantle only renders this service to those who wear it, not in thought but in deed, "so also would her humility be of no avail except to those who endeavored to imitate it." She then concluded in these words: "Therefore, my daughter, clothe thyself with this humility."

"O, how dear are humble souls to Mary," says St. Bernard; "this Blessed Virgin recognizes and loves those who love her, and is near to all who call upon her; and especially to those whom she sees like unto herself in chastity and humility." Hence the Saint exhorts all who love Mary to be humble: "Emulate this virtue of Mary, if thou lovest her." Marinus, or Martin d' Alberto, of the Society of Jesus, used to sweep the house, and collect the filth, through love for this Blessed Virgin. The Divine Mother one day appeared to him as Father Nieremberg relates in his life, and thanking him, as it were, said, "O, how pleasing to me is this humble action done—for my love."

Then, O my Queen, I can never be really thy child unless I am humble, but dost thou not see that my sins, after having rendered me ungrateful to my Lord, have also made me proud? O my Mother, do thou supply a remedy. By the merit of thy humility obtain that I may be truly humble, and thus become thy child, Amen.

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## *Our Lady of Humility*



Our Lady of Humility Icon

This image of Our Blessed Mother comes from the Russian Orthodox tradition where it is called Our Lady of Extreme Humility. Mary is known for her tenderness and humility because she accepted God's will for her life even though she knew it would cause her pain.

## ***The Humility of Mary***

Taken from the *The Glories of Mary*

by St. Alphonsus Liguori

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"Humility," says St. Bernard, "is the foundation and guardian of virtues;" and with reason, for without it no other virtue can exist in a soul. Should she possess all virtues, all will depart when humility is gone. But, on the other hand, as St. Francis de Sales wrote to St. Jane Frances de Chantal "God so loves humility, that whenever He sees it, He is immediately drawn thither." This beautiful and so necessary virtue was unknown in the world; but the Son of God Himself came on earth to teach it by His Own example, and willed that in that virtue in particular we should endeavor to imitate Him: *Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.* Mary, being the first and most perfect disciple of Jesus Christ in the practice of all virtues, was the first also in that of humility, and by it merited to be exalted above all creatures. It was revealed to St. Matilda that the first virtue in which the Blessed Mother particularly exercised herself, from her very childhood, was that of humility.

The first effect of humility of heart is a lowly opinion of ourselves; "Mary had always so humble an opinion of herself, that, as it was revealed to the same St. Matilda, although she saw herself enriched with greater graces than all other creatures, she never preferred herself to anyone." The Abbot Rupert, explaining the passage of the sacred Canticles, *Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse,...with one hair of thy neck,* [Cant.4-9] says, that the humble opinion which Mary had of herself was precisely that hair of the Spouse's neck with which she wounded the heart of God." Not indeed that Mary considered herself a sinner; for humility is truth, as St. Teresa remarks; and Mary knew that she had never offended God; nor was it that she did not acknowledge that she had received greater graces from God than all other creatures; for a humble heart always acknowledges the special favors of the Lord, to humble herself the more; but the Divine Mother, by the greater light where with she knew the infinite greatness and goodness of God, also knew her own nothingness, and therefore, more than all others, humbled herself, saying with the sacred Spouse: *Do not consider that I am brown, because the sun hath altered my color.* [Cant. 1: 5] That is as St. Bernard explains it, "When I approach Him, I find myself black." Yes says St. Bernardine, for "the Blessed Virgin had always the majesty of God, and her own nothingness, present to her mind." As a beggar, when clothed with a rich garment, which as been bestowed upon her, does not pride herself on it in the presence of her giver, but is rather humbled, being reminded thereby of her own poverty, so also the more Mary saw herself enriched, the more did she humble herself, remembering that all was God's gift; whence she herself told St. Elizabeth of Hungary, that "she might rest assured that she looked upon herself as most vile and unworthy of God's grace." Therefore St. Bernardine says, that "after the Son of God, no creature in the world was so exalted as Mary, because no creature in the world ever humbled itself so much as she did."

Moreover, it is an act of humility to conceal heavenly gifts. Mary wished to conceal from St. Joseph the great favor whereby she had become the Mother of God, although it seemed necessary to make it known to him, if only to remove from the mind of her poor spouse any suspicions as to her virtue, which he might have entertained on seeing her pregnant; or at least the perplexity in which it indeed threw him; for St. Joseph, on the one hand unwilling to doubt Mary's chastity, and on the other ignorant of the mystery, was *minded to put her away privately.* [Matt. 1:19] This he would have done, had not the Angel revealed to him that his Spouse was pregnant by the operation of the Holy Ghost.

Again, a soul that is truly humble refuses her own praise; and should praises be bestowed on her, she refers them all to God. Behold, Mary is disturbed at hearing herself praised by St. Gabriel; and when St. Elizabeth said, *Blessed art thou among women...and whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?...blessed art thou that has believed.* [Luke 1:42] Mary referred all to God, and answered in that humble Canticle, *My soul doth magnify the Lord,* [Ibid, 46-47] as if she had said; "Thou dost praise me, Elizabeth; but I praise the Lord, to Whom alone honor is due; thou wonderest that I should come to thee, and I wonder at the divine goodness in which alone my spirit exults;" *and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.* Thou praisest me because I have believed; I praise my God, because I thought, and knew, that of myself I possessed nothing. For this same reason I did not desire to be praised; I only desired that praises should be given to the Creator and Giver of all." Wherefore an ancient author, speaking of the humility of Mary, says: "O truly blessed humility, which hath given God to men, opened Heaven, and delivered souls from Hell."

It is also a part of humility to serve others. Mary did not refuse to go and serve Elizabeth for three months. Hence St. Bernard says, "Elizabeth wondered that Mary should have come to visit her, but that which is still more admirable is, that she came not to be ministered to, but to minister."

Those who are humble are retiring, and choose the last places; and therefore Mary, remarks St. Bernard, when her Son was preaching in a house, as it is related by St. Matthew, [12:46] wishing to speak to Him, would not of her own accord enter, but "remained outside, and did not avail herself of her maternal authority to interrupt Him." For the same reason also when she was with the Apostles awaiting the coming of the Holy Ghost, she took the lowest place, as St. Luke relates, *All these were persevering with one mind in prayer, with the women, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus.* [Acts 1:14] Not that St. Luke was ignorant of the Divine Mother's merits, on account of which he should have named her in the first place, but because she had taken the last place amongst the Apostles and women; and therefore he described them all, as an author remarks, in the order in which they were. Hence St. Bernard says, "Justly has the last become the first, who being the first of all became the last."

In fine, those who are humble, love to be contemned; therefore, we do not read that Mary showed herself in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, when her Son was received by the people with so much honor: but on the other hand, at the death of her Son she did not shrink from appearing on Calvary, through fear of the dishonor which would accrue to her when it was known that she was the Mother of Him Who was condemned to die an infamous death as a criminal. Therefore